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BLOOD BROTHERHOOD

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The Tanala, like all Madagascar tribes, attach great importance to oaths of brotherhood, called *mifanangena*. Entering such a bond is a personal matter. The permission of the family is not necessary. It seems to be a genuine expression of affection and I never heard of its being used for political purposes or personal gain. Brotherhood may be sworn by two men—the commonest form—by two women, or by a man and a woman. Persons of the same social class can take the oath, also a noble and a commoner, or a commoner and a slave, but not a noble and a slave.

Brotherhood between a man and a woman is rather rare. It is practically limited to couples who love each other but are precluded from marrying. Such people may be within the proscribed degrees of relationship, or the woman may be already married and unwilling to leave her husband because of their children. A couple who have taken the brotherhood oath are thenceforth debarred from having sexual relations. To do so would be to commit incest of a particularly bad sort. The ancestral spirits would punish both by death at an early date. After taking the oath the man and woman can be together as much as they wish without scandal. The man can even come and live in her house in the absence of her husband. The only exception to the rule against oath brother and sister having sexual relations is in the case of married people who take the oath with each other as an expression of devotion. This occurs, but is extremely rare. I was told of one couple who had lived together for several years without children. The man could not afford a plural wife, so they divorced each other, took the oath of brotherhood, and then each remarried.

Persons who have taken the oath are considered more closely related than even children of the same mother, the closest natural bond. A man stands in the same relation to the relatives of his oath brother as does the brother himself. He calls them by the same relationship terms and is subject to the same marriage restrictions. Other members of the two families feel that a relationship has been established between them and that they owe each other assistance, but their marriages are not restricted. The children of blood brothers are governed by the same marriage regulations as those of real brothers and sisters and this is supposed to extend to their descendants indefinitely. Actually, it seems to be ignored after about the third generation.

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608 Blood oaths of the parent-child type, found among the Betsileo, are lacking among the Tanala. Both parties are of equal importance in the ceremony and have equal rights and duties thereafter. These are specified in the oath, which is varied to meet the wishes of the participants. The duty of mutual assistance is always included and the oath brothers often agree to hold their property in common. Even when this has not been included in the bond one brother can use the other's property without permission, if the owner is away. In a few cases brothers agree to hold even their wives in common, but this is very rare when both live in the same village. The bond is regarded with the utmost seriousness and it is thought that any infraction will be punished supernaturally. An interesting modern development is that brothers now may promise to help each other with the reservation that the help shall not bring them into conflict with the government. Under this a man can legitimately refuse to help his brother if he is a fugitive from justice.

608 791 The ceremony of taking the oath is attended by members of both families and a few non-related men, who act as witnesses. It is supervised by an *ombiasy*. He takes a wooden winnowing tray filled with water and mixes in it wood ashes, rice husks, seven clumps of grass, including the roots, ox dung found in the forest (called "dung of an ox that does not know its mother") and some of the small pellets of earth which are left attached to roots hanging in the air after a bark has fallen. A spear is then held vertically in the bowl, with its point down. Each of the oath takers grasps the spear shaft with his right hand while the *ombiasy* grasps it with his left hand, above the other two. In his right hand the *ombiasy* holds a knife with which he taps the spear shaft lightly and continuously and repeats the following invocation:

"Listen, listen, oh gods! *Zanahary* the male, *Zanahary* the female, Rangidina, Rantomoa, Mosofamaky jahana, Beeronerona, Rangamina, Andrangofalafa, Madiovazankoho, Tsimangano no hananga, the gold and the sun! Listen, you others who are in the sky! Man is made from blood which you have made solid and to which you have given life. You have advised us, 'If you have business of any sort, do not forget to tell us.' Since so-and-so and so-and-so [giving names] are about to make an oath of friendship here, you have been called, oh gods, to assist in that oath.

"These are the terms on which they enter the bond: The father, the mother, the property, the money, the cattle, the houses and the wives are henceforth to be held in common. They will redeem each

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other if one is sold for debt and help each other in death [i.e., provide money, cattle, rice, etc., for the funeral]. If one of the oath brothers or his family is hungry and he demands help of the other in the name of the oath, and he refuses it, punish him, Gods and sacred oath [the phrase is *Zanahary sy fihananana*]. If one is on the side of the river where the canoe is tied and his oath brother calls him from the other side, wishing to pass over, and he refuses to take him over, observe it and punish him, Gods and sacred oath. If enemies lie in wait to kill one and the other can frustrate them and does not, punish him, Gods and sacred oath. If one fails in his duty because he does not recognize the other, or because it is impossible for him to do what the other asks, do not punish him, Gods and sacred oath. Under all circumstances, if one brother betrays the other may the crocodiles and water spirits [*lolo*] seize him when he crosses water and the lightning strike him when he is on land."

The *ombiasy* then recites the following imprecations on the oath breaker, calling out the number before each curse: "*Iraika* [one]! May his belly swell if he does treason. *Roa* [two]! May all evils happen to the traitor at once. *Telo* [three]! May the lightning break him in three pieces. *Efatra* [four]! May the crocodile devour him. *Dimy* [five]! May sickness slay both him and his family. *Enena* [six]! May his life be suspended between heaven and earth. *Fito* [seven]! May his liver and gall be torn out. *Valo* [eight]! May no remedy save him from death. *Sivy* [nine]! May he be subject to many maladies and may his stomach swell. *Folo* [ten]! May leprosy eat away his fingers and toes."

The *ombiasy* then begins to count again and calls down blessings on the brothers if they keep the oath: "One! May their wealth, goods and children increase. Two! May cattle and honor come to them. Three! May they live in *Zanahary*, the life giver, so that they will never be sick or troubled. Four! May only old age and death separate them from honor, the respect of others and wealth. Five! May money and children come to them. Six! May they have the honor and consideration of others, Oh God, and never be sick or even indisposed. Seven! May this oath bring them good fortune and be useful to them. Eight! May their money never leave them and may cattle enter their pens. Nine! May they and their families live together and never separate."

After this the *ombiasy* invokes the ancestral spirits of the oath brothers, calling them to witness the bond and repeating the entire formula without change. He then makes a small cut over the heart

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608 of each with a sharp knife. Each man takes a piece of raw ginger
791 root and smears it with his own blood. They face each other and each covers the other's eyes with his left hand while he places the ginger root in the other's mouth with his right. They do this simultaneously, repeating together: "May you also become blind if you are a traitor to me." The *ombiasy* then takes a leaf of the *longoja* plant and pulls it into two pieces lengthwise, saying: "If either of you is a traitor, may his body be torn in two like this leaf, so that one part will be on the east coast of this island and the other on the west." Half the leaf is laid on the eastern and half on the western side of the house. Then the oath brothers pay the *ombiasy* and witnesses, and name and point out to each other the members of their families.

The above account was obtained from Ratzakoba, an *ombiasy* of the Zafindiamanana gens of the Tanala Menabe, and is a description of a particular ceremony which he had himself directed. Accounts obtained from other *ombiasy* indicate that each one has his own formula, although all of these conform to a definite pattern. The use of the rice winnower, grasping of the spear, tapping with the knife, invocation first of the gods and then of the ancestors, and the eating of ginger root smeared with each other's blood, are constant. The materials mixed in the rice winnower, the terms of the contract and the blessings and imprecations are variable. One set of imprecations is as follows: 1. May illness come and slay the traitor. 2. May his liver become diseased and be covered with spots. 3 and 4. Same as in imprecations previously given. 5. May the sickness turn and turn in him, i.e., may it be constantly active and attack all organs. 6. May the malady enter him six times a day. 7. May his gall bladder burst. 8. May the illness, when it comes, kill him before he can drink water, i.e., instantly. 9. May sickness spread through his whole body. 10. May all his limbs be broken.

728 When a village was captured and reduced to vassalage the heads
796 of the lineages and more important families were required to take an oath of loyalty to the victors. This was identical in content and procedure with the oath of blood brotherhood except that the victors remained unbound. The natives knew of no instance in which the chiefs of two gentes had entered into blood brotherhood to cement an alliance between their followers.

OLD AGE

165 Although no vital statistics are available for the Tanala, the life expectation for adults seems to be little if at all inferior to that